

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5429

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7395

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NI

SUBJECT: TARKA RESIGNATION

REF: LAGOS 7191

SUMMARY: DESPITE TARKA'S RESIGNATION, EDITORIAL DEMANDS CONTINUE FOR FMG INVESTIGATION OF DABOH'S CHARGES AGAINST EX-COMMISSIONER. FMG HAS MADE NO COMMENT ON POSSIBILITY OF INVESTIGATION ALTHOUGH IT DOES ACKNOWLEDGE PUBLIC CONCERN OVER CORRUPTION. FMG CHOICE OF BRIGADIER MOHAMMED AS TARKA'S REPLACEMENT ALSO SUBJECT OF CONCERN. TARKA REMAINS POPULAR FIGURE IN NORTHERN AREA AND WILL LIKELY RETAIN POLITICAL INFLUENCE THERE. END SUMMARY

1. INITIAL PRESS AND PRIVATE REACTIONS TO TARKA'S RESIGNATION INDICATE BOTH SURPRISE AND RELIEF, SURPRISE THAT HE ACTUALLY DECIDED TO STEP DOWN AND RELIEF THAT HE THEREBY SAVED FMG FROM DIFFICULT POSITION. EDITORIALS, AFTER CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES FOR THEIR ROLE IN EXPOSING CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES, HAVE TAKEN LINE THAT RESIGNATION DOES NOT RELIEVE FMG FROM RESPONSIBILITY OF CONDUCTING FULL-SCALE, PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION AGAINST TARKA. THEY ARGUE THAT INQUIRY WOULD GIVE TARKA OPPORTUNITY

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TO CLEAR HIS NAME, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY WOULD PROVE TO PUBLIC

FMG'S GOOD INTENTIONS TOWARDS ERADICATING CORRUPTION AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

2. FMG STATEMENT ACCEPTING TARKA'S RESIGNATION NOTES PUBLIC CONCERN OVER THIS AND OTHER SIMILAR INCIDENTS (OF CORRUPTION), AND STATES "NO RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT CAN BE INDIFFERENT IN MATTERS OF THIS NATURE." STATEMENT CONTINUES BY NOTING "ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS VITAL FOR THE GOVERNMENT NOT TO ALLOW ITSELF TO BE STAMPEDED INTO TAKING ANY PRECIPITATE ACTION THAT COULD DISCOURAGE GOOD, HONEST, SELFLESS AND DEDICATED PEOPLE WITH TRUE LOVE OF THIS COUNTRY, FROM ACCEPTING PUBLIC OFFICE." THIS STATEMENT ALSO NOTES GENERAL GOWON'S "PERSONAL GRATITUDE," AND THAT OF THE NATION, TO TARKA "FOR HIS LONG AND ABLE SERVICE" TO NIGERIA, "ESPECIALLY DURING LONG YEARS OF NATION'S AGONY." NO MENTION IS MADE OF ANY FMG PLANS TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST TARKA.

3. TARKA, MEANWHILE, HAS RETURNED TO HIS HOME AREA IN NORTH. IN HIS RESIGNATION STATEMENT, AND IN PRESS INTERVIEW AUGUST 3, HE MADE CLEAR HE HAS NO INTENTION OF DROPPING LIBEL SUITS HE HAS BROUGHT AGAINST THREE NEWSPAPERS. HE REGARDED HIS RESIGNATION AS END OF ONE CHAPTER IN HIS POLITICAL LIFE, AND NOW INTENDS TO MEET WITH FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES ON POSSIBILITY OF FORMING NEW POLITICAL PARTY WHEN PRESENT BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS ENDED. HE STATES HIS FRIENDS ARE IN SOME CASES HIS FORMER ENEMIES, BUT DOES NOT FURTHER CLARIFY THIS POINT.

4. APPOINTMENT OF BRIGADIER MURTALA MOHAMMED TO SUCCEED TARKA HAS CAUSED SOME STIR, BOTH IN PRESS AND IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. EDITORIALS GENERALLY SPECULATE OVER FMG MOTIVES IN NAMING SENIOR MILITARY MAN TO REPLACE CIVILIAN COMMISSIONER, AND CONCLUDE THIS IS SOLID INDICATION OF FMG INTENTION NOT TO RENEW APPOINTMENTS OF CIVILIAN COMMISSIONERS WHEN THEIR TERMS OF OFFICE EXPIRE IN OCTOBER. THEY THEREFORE ASSUME NIGERIA WILL ENTER PHASE OF COMPLETE MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN LATE 1974, BUT MAKE NO VALUE JUDGMENTS ON THIS LIKELIHOOD.

5. PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS REVEAL SOME DISMAY OVER FMG'S DECISION TO REPLACE ALLEGEDLY CORRUPT OFFICIAL WITH MILITARY CONFIDENTIAL

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OFFICER WHO IS ALSO TAINTED WITH SUSPICIONS OF CORRUPTION. MOHAMMED, A HAUSA OFFICER WHO WAS ONE OF LEADERS OF JULY 1966 COUP AND WHO HAS CHECKERED HISTORY OF ALLEGIANCE TO GENERAL GOWON, IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE PROFITED RATHER WELL FROM HIS VARIOUS MILITARY POSITIONS. HE WILL RETAIN HIS MILITARY POST AS INSPECTOR OF SIGNALS, WHICH WILL GIVE HIM DUAL ROLE IN RUNNING NATION'S COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS, THEREBY PERHAPS INCREASING POSSIBILITIES FOR GRAFT OR POLITICAL MISUSE OF

THESE FACILITIES.

6. COMMENT: EMBASSY FILES INDICATE HOHAMMED HAS BEEN LINKED WITH PAST RUMORS OF COUP PLOTS AGAINST PRESENT MILITARY GOVERNMENT. HE IS REPORTED TO DISLIKE GOWON, APPARENTLY FEELING HE, AS LEADER OF JULY 1966 COUP, SHOULD HAVE BECOME HEAD OF STATE. MOHAMMED'S POLITICAL AMBITIONS ARE UNKNOWN; HOWEVER HE HAS APPARENTLY LITTLE SUPPORT AMONG MILITARY, WHICH DECERASES ANY LIKELIHOOD OF HIS MISUSING CONTROL OVER NATION'S COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS FOR PERSONAL POLITICAL AMBITIONS. HE IS, HOWEVER, CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH MAJOR GENERAL KATSINA, AND HIS NEW POSITION MUST BE SEEN AS INCREASING INFLUENCE OF NORTHERN OFFICERS OVER NIGERIA'S POLITICAL FUTURE.

7. TARKA REMAINS A POPULAR POLITICAL FIGURE IN HIS HOME AREA AND WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH HIS ASSESSEMENT THAT HIS RESIGNATION IS TEMPORARY SET-BACK. HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACTOR, THOUGH IN A LESS INFLUENTIAL POSITION, AND WILL PROBABLY PLAY SOME NATIONAL POLITICAL ROLE IN POST-1976 ERA. WE ARE SURPROSED, HOWEVER AT TARKA'S APPARENT DECISION TO PURSUE HIS LIBEL CASES AGAINST MEDIA AS THIS WILL TEND TO KEEP ISSUE OF HIS CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC EYE, THUS INCREASING PRESSURE ON FMG FOR OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES AGAINST HIM. GIVEN NUMBER OF PRESSING PROBLEMS FACED BY FMG, INCLUDING CENSUS DEBATE AND INFLATION, FMG MAY HAVE REACHED PRIOR AGREEMENT WITH TARKA TO EXCHANGE HIS RESIGNATION FOR PROMISE NOT TO INVESTIGATE. THUS TARKA'S PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THIS MATTER WAS PRESUMABLY AIMED AT BOOSTINGHIS PUBLIC IMAGE AS THE AGGRIEVED PARTY RATHER THAN AS A STATEMENT OF HIS TRUE INTENT.

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